

## 4 Items That Omnichannel Forgot

By Tim Tang — April 10, 2014

<http://risnews.edgl.com/retail-news/4-Items-That-Omnichannel-Forgot91974>

Mobile technologies and online competitors have forced retailers to reconsider decades of retail best practices. Sales associates desperately need new tools to engage with digital-savvy customers who have high expectations backed by numerous alternative purchasing channels.

In this new world, retailers face a plethora of omnichannel solutions, which promise to enable the consumer to buy what she wants, when she wants, how she wants. However, with so much focus on the consumer's smartphone, critical details are being overlooked.

What happens when a consumer attempts to access her loyalty rewards, but can't connect because the store's WiFi coverage is insufficient? What happens when a tween tries to access her friend's latest Outfit of the Day or YouTube Haul video to figure out which skirt to buy, but has to wait and wait and wait... because too many other people in the store are competing for limited Internet access?

Smartphones and tablets are pieces of a much bigger puzzle. Retailers who do not take a holistic approach to omnichannel solutions may risk alienating customers with an unsatisfying in-store experience. For example...

**1. Store Network** – A customer's worst omnichannel experience will occur during a retailer's greatest sales opportunity: weekends, holidays, back to school, Black Friday, etc. When customers swarm into stores during a promotion, a proportionate amount of network congestion will occur. Having a great mobile app or loyalty program is useless if customers can't connect.

Retailers with insufficient budgets to address in-store Internet access might consider other solutions. Advanced compression techniques may create additional "virtual capacity" within their existing network. Quality of Service prioritization can ensure mission-critical transactions will thrive during peak periods of congestion. New networking technologies can transform best-effort broadband Internet access into enterprise-grade WANs with SLAs.

**2. Guest WiFi** – While most retailers have mobile applications, surprisingly few provide Guest WiFi. Since many consumers can't afford unlimited data plans, few will be willing to leverage their personal data allowances to access product reviews, videos and advertising. Guest WiFi frees the consumer to fully experience all of a retailers' engaging content.

Guest WiFi reflects the retailer's brand. Retailers must ensure complete store coverage, preserve the store's PCI security compliance, and protect consumers from hostile Internet threats. If customers lose their data or their identities while in-store, they will blame the last logo they saw on their smartphones. Providing excellent WiFi service is not a trivial exercise. Retailers need to ask, "Are we prepared to be an ISP?"

**3. In-Store Media Operations** – Digital signage should surprise and delight customers. Yet, dark screens are a frequent phenomenon in today's stores. A dark screen says, "We had something special for you, but we are unable to deliver."

Retailers will want to consider critical details such as installation, operations, field maintenance, and customer care. The numerous devices (monitors, media players, A/V distribution, etc.) and content delivery requirements present a daunting responsibility. If in-house resources are insufficient, third-party services should be considered.

**4. Associate "Customer Experience" Training** – A store's key advantage over online competitors is the associate. When a well-prepared associate positively contributes to the shopping experience, customers will be favorably inclined to purchase.

An efficient and effective method for training associates is to leverage video to visually communicate associate expectations. To maximize performance improvements, associates need on-demand access to training from the sales floor.

With great opportunity comes great responsibility. To succeed in omni-channel initiatives, retailers will want to focus beyond the consumer's smartphone or the sales associate's tablet. A holistic approach includes consideration of the store network, guest WiFi, in-store media operations and associate customer experience training.

*Tim Tang is a director of enterprise retail solutions for [Hughes Network Systems LLC](#), an EchoStar company.*